

JOURNAL TO MARS

By Brad Garber

WHY WE LIKE IT: *Pilgrims have set out on a colonizing expedition to Mars and as they draw farther away from Earth's magnetic physical and psychological gravity, the 'Journal', which is as much diary as logue, records the changes in their relationships—no longer, it seems, determined by our familiar space-time model. Old social alliances fall away to be replaced by new attractions. Descriptions enthrall and attention to detail is scrupulous... 'Sometimes I cry. Have to watch out about that, though. Don't need tears floating around and getting into the electronics.' Technically it's science fiction but the voice—with its sophisticated edge of sarcasm—make us feel like it belongs more in The New Yorker than Tales from Outer Space. The poignant last journal entry underlines the uncertainty ahead for the crew and as writing, reassures us of the author's well-placed trust in incompleteness.*

Journal to Mars

Day One: Feeling happy to have left the Earth's atmosphere without incident. Just sort of floating, now. Jason and I have a great discussion about terraforming. Sandy is still mastering urination in zero gravity. Somewhat interesting to see Earth moving away.

Day Two: The beef jerky is pretty good. Wouldn't you know it...started my period. Passing the moon. Talked to mom, by Skype. She seems to be a little unhappy. Jason is so funny. Greg is writing poetry and Sally is playing chess with Amy.

Day Four: Yesterday was sort of busy. The crew met to discuss feelings, after three days. Jerry was sort of a downer, but this is not surprising, given his pre-trip jitters. Most of us wanted him to stay home. Just sort of floating along.

Day Six: Eating pot brownies is just fine, in space. I didn't wake up for days!

Day Ten: Wow! Had some more brownies! Sure glad we could bring a few pounds of really good shit with us! I love this crew! I'm not sure, but Jason seems to like me. Gonna talk to Cheri about him; she boned him before we left.

Day Twenty: Sure glad we get "The Daily Show!" Not sure how long this transmission will be good. I brought some tunes along, but some in the crew don't really like Cajun music.

Day Thirty: So much has happened! Sandy, Sally, Cheri and I have decided that sex is a good thing on this voyage. Amy is not sure, yet. Talked to mom, by Skype. I'm getting tired of Beef Stroganoff for dinner.

Day Thirty-two: Whoa! Something hit us! Whacked off an antenna. Not sure I have access to

Facebook, now.

Day Forty: Jason is SO FUCKING GOOOOOD!

Day Forty-five: So is Greg! MY GAWD!

Day Fifty-five: Have watched "Wall-E" WAY too many times! Cry when he and Eva hold hands. Can't connect up to Skype. There is a lot of silence, sometimes.

Day Eighty: Yeah, it's been a while. Stuff seems to slow down. I hate reconstituted string beans!

Day Eighty-five: OMG...Greg let a turd loose! It was floating around like a runaway dog! We had to chase it down and contain it. GROSSSSS! Wish I could tell my mom.

Day Eighty-nine: OMG...now Hardy's coming on to me! Sally's a bitch. She seemed OK, during training, but she uses too much toilet paper and is sort of hitting on Jason. We're halfway through the SPAM. Glad we're still getting video from Earth. I can only read back issues of Sports Illustrated, Glamour and The New Yorker for so long.

Day Ninety: Damn! I thought so! Things weren't feeling right. So much for condoms in space. It's gotta be Jason's! Suddenly, my bedding seems dirty. Too bad they couldn't load the washing machine in. Guess I'll go take a shower. Wish I could tell Dad & Mom. I guess I'll send'em a message through Mission Control, although I maybe should wait to see if it takes. All of this floating around....

Day One Hundred: What a day! Oh, by the way, it's ALWAYS "day" out here. The damned

sun never disappears, and it sort of looks just as big as it does on Earth. We can't see Earth much, these days. It's a black blip across the face of the sun, sometimes, but that's about it. The jokers back at Mission Control blared "Halfway to Paradise," through the intercom. It's difficult to think about how far we've come and how far we have, yet, to go. Another hundred days, or so, before we land on Mars and set things up. I thought I was prepared for this.

Day 102: Was on the exercise cycle when something blasted through the vessel. Two fucking leaks! We were losing pressure, fast, until Cheri and Hardy, patched the holes. Pretty scary! I'm glad Cheri and Hardy are getting along. It was tough, telling him that I was pregnant. I could tell he wanted me. I've got a good little bump going. Wonder what it would be like to grow up, never seeing a tree, or feeling wind. Sometimes I cry. Have to watch out about that, though. Don't need tears floating around and getting into the electronics.

Day 110: Jason's been really good. I think he's wondering about what is growing inside of me and what it's going to mean and how healthy the kid can be on Mars. In the meantime, Amy has

been “sleeping” with me. Jason doesn’t care. We talked about this sort of relationship stuff before we left Earth. Gawd! I remember some parties, back on Earth. Some wild shit! I wish I could have some pot.

Day 120: Funny how time doesn’t mean anything, anymore. We all have stuff to do, to keep this bird flying, but it’s mostly controlled back home and it gets a bit boring. If it wasn’t for talking about the past and the future, with the other folks, my mind might go numb. But, I can feel the tyke moving around inside of me, so I have a different sort of conversation. So hot! I heard Sally and Bill fucking their brains out. Made me miss Jason, a little. He’s off with Sandy, these days, and I think Cheri is preggers. I hope we have enough modules, when we land! What a bunch of rabbits! LOL! Mars is getting a lot closer!

Day 133: Another rock ripped through the ship! This one was bigger and we all had to scramble to plug the holes. Pretty damned scary! Hell, if something bigger hits us, we’re all dead! We have some shields, outside, but they aren’t much match when encountering something traveling about 50kps! I admit, this was the one time I was genuinely scared. I am holding my baby. I can only think of how much my mother wanted me to stay home. This is what I was trained for, dammit! This is MY dream! I feel, sometimes, like Magellan, or Sir Frances Drake. Anyway, glad we still get streaming videos. Off to heat up some pasta with reconstituted shrimp meat....

Day 147: My hair is too long, but you can’t just cut hair in a vacuum. It would get all tangled up in the gear. Seriously, though, all of we women are looking pretty sketchy. You never know how a woman’s upper lip looks until she can’t wax the thing. My GAWD, Sally...poor girl. Of course, can’t say much for the men. They all look like they walked out of Grizzly Adams show. Jason has a unibrow! I never knew. Amy’s been really good to me, in SO many ways.

Day 163: About 40-50 more days. It’s sort of like counting the miles down until you get home, after a long trip. If you mix the egg concentrate with orange juice, you can actually get some

good-tasting shit. I tried it, after re-reading one of the “The New Yorker” special publications on culinary stuff. GAWD! The kid is moving around a lot. We don’t have an ultrasound with us; it’ll get blasted up in another wave of migrants. So, it’ll be a surprise to see what pops out. I think it’s a boy, though. I can’t wait to send photos back to mom and dad.

Day 164: Watched “Wall-E” again. Amy was holding my hand. Had to fight back the tears, so I didn’t gum up the works. I’m trying to get Amy and Jason together.

Day 188: Getting things ready for landing. This is getting tense and there have been some low level arguments. I think everyone is worried about the entry into Mars atmosphere and what the hell we’re all going to do, for the rest of our lives, on this outpost in the solar system. Everyone

seems a bit snippy, although Cheri and Sally and I are all pregnant and, I think, we tend to put some things into perspective. After all, we are populating a new planet! That’s exciting...sort of an “Eve” thing. I just want to land and start moving around in the modules. The plan, of course, is to move out of the modules into a larger enclosure, in another year or two, and to terraform the place. The whole process is going to keep everyone busy, and I’m going pump out babies!

Oh...Hardy....

Day 200: Mars is looming. We are so close! It’s a beautiful looking place. Not blue, of course, but still lovely. It’s odd to not see any water. I remember flying into Kona, Hawaii, after six hours of flying over nothing but water, water, water. I wonder if I’ll miss that. We can’t even see Earth, anymore. Just a black dot, somewhere in the distance. 23 weeks into it, and the little critter is kicking the shit out of me! I love him/her!

Day 203: Preparing for landing. All systems are GO! Mission Control blasted Bowie’s “Space Oddity” and Elton John’s “Rocket Man” over the intercom while we checked all of the electronics and mechanics. I kissed Cheri for the first time. It was wonderful. We are, all, so full of hope. Stephen and Bill are back together. Jason loves to rub my stomach and has been

very caring. We are, all, very nervous.

Day 204: Don't know if I can even call this another day. It all went so fast. We entered Mars atmosphere, which is not much. But, it shook the crap out of us for awhile, until we settled into the glide down. We all held each other, briefly, with towels around our heads to soak up the tears, and told each other how much we loved each other and, then, strapped ourselves into our pods. It was not supposed to be a rough landing, but you never know how you'll land when you do it on another planet. We could feel the thrusters kick in as we descended, and everything was surprisingly smooth. Then, BOOM, we landed and everything was quiet. No one stirred for a very long time. We all had to process what had just happened and where we were. No one cheered. I remembered watching that odd show, "Naked & Alive." I had just been dropped off, 140 million miles away from the closest Starbucks. I was not expected to make it back. I made that decision. My child and I are pilgrims, explorers, dreamers.

Day 210: The modules are in place. We spend days eating the last of the SPAM, the freeze-dried crap in the bins and the last of the powdered wine. We look for that little black shadow of Earth, drifting across the face of the sun and wait for the first supply shipment from Earth which, we are sure, will arrive on time. I hold my growing belly at night.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *The seemingly inexhaustible human spirit of curiosity and thirst for exploration is what prompted me to write about what I imagine a colonizing journey to Mars might be like. I mean, really? I've heard that people are signing up to go! Personally, I believe it is a stupid and doomed enterprise, to try to inhabit a dusty desolate rock that, from an astronomical standpoint, is a block away, when the nearest possibly inhabitable planet is probably a million light years away. But humans will be dreamers, so let them have their fun...and babies.*

BIO: *Brad has degrees in biology, chemistry and law. He writes, paints, draws, photographs, hunts for mushrooms and snakes, and runs around naked in the Great Northwest. Since 1991, he has published poetry, essays and weird stuff in such publications as Edge Literary Journal, Pure Slush, Front Range Review, Tulip Tree Publishing, Sugar Mule, Third Wednesday, Barrow Street, Black Fox Literary Magazine, Barzakh Magazine, Ginosko Journal, Junto Magazine,*

Slab, Panoplyzine, Split Rock Review, Smoky Blue Literary Magazine, The Offbeat *and other quality publications. 2011, 2013 & 2018 Pushcart Prize nominee.*